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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MONTANA
MISSOULA DIVISION**

YAAK VALLEY FOREST COUNCIL, Plaintiff, v. SONNY PERDUE, Secretary of Agriculture and UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE; U.S. FOREST SERVICE, Northern Region, KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST; and LEANNE MARTEN, Regional Forester, Northern Region; CHAD BENSON Forest Supervisor, Kootenai National Forest Defendants,	Case No. _____
	DECLARATION OF RICK BASS

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I, Rick Bass declare as follows:

1. I am a resident of Yaak, Montana.
2. In the late 1970s, I studied Wildlife Science and Geology at Utah State University. I hold a B.S. in Geology with an emphasis in Wildlife Management from Utah State University. After college, I was employed as a Wildlife Biologist Intern at Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. and subsequently worked as an oil and gas geologist and consultant in Mississippi.

3. In 1987, I moved to the remote Yaak Valley and became a founding member of Yaak Valley Forest Council. Currently, I am the board chair for the Yaak Valley Forest Council, a community service organization located in northwestern Montana's Yaak Valley.

4. I have published numerous books, essays, short stories and articles on grizzly bears and other endangered species. My novels have focused on environmental activism, inner-nature experience and preservation of the wilderness. Some notable titles include "The Lost Grizzlies" published in 1995, "The Book of Yaak" published in 1996 and "The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana" published in 2010.

5. I have also taught as the William Kittredge Chair at the University of Montana and as writer-in-residence at Montana State University.

6. For 32 years, I have been working both individually and in various local collaboratives to help reform outdated and injurious logging practices on the Kootenai National Forest: namely, clearcutting and roadbuilding into sensitive areas, along with insufficient monitoring of weeds, old growth, grizzly needs, road security, and sediment source yields from areas where firefighting has occurred. These cumulative effects and more lead me to believe the Yaak is a hard place to be a grizzly bear and it is getting harder in the face of additional pressures on the landscape.

7. I have been hiking and hunting the hills of the Yaak Valley for many thousands of days. I have seen the Yaak grizzlies' tracks several times, but have only seen actual grizzly bears approximately 30 or 40 times. I have been charged by black bears as well as grizzlies—Maggie, the latter, a tall lean adult with one subadult, this however will not deter me from continuing to hike in the Yaak and observe and experience this magnificent fauna of the Valley.

8. I worry that the lack of analysis of the PNT by the USFS and statutorily required carrying capacity is harmful because female grizzlies with cubs depend upon high alpine habitat which will be crossed directly by the trail. Negative encounters with humans—ranging from the stress of displacement to less secure habitat, to the surprising of sows by a high volume of through-hikers on the trails that traverse—threaten this small, isolated population.

9. I derive great pleasure from knowing there are still “wild” grizzlies. Unlike other populations, such as the NCDE grizzly, the Yaak grizzly rarely encounters humans or human influences. The Yaak grizzly are more reliant on a plant-based diet and infrequently consume meat. This specialized and secluded population is physically smaller in stature and far more sensitive to ecosystem alterations. This is due in part to the Yaak Valley ecosystem.

10. The Yaak Valley contains the lowest elevations in Montana, making it the wettest in the state. Parts of the valley are classified as an inland rainforest. During the last major period of global warming, Yaak remained largely unglaciated, trapped beneath while the rest of the ice retreated. What remains now is a low bowl of swamps, fens, marshes and floating peat bogs.

11. Region One and Region Six of the United States Forest Service both have failed to evaluate the PNT’s carrying capacity and management objectives. Without a Comprehensive Plan the agency and public are unaware of the consequences and responsibilities in managing a trail.

12. While the agency personnel have stated that they do not think there will be any problems between hikers and grizzlies, because “hikers and grizzlies get along fine in Glacier,” this is not a fair comparison. This troubles me professionally. How can such conclusory statements be made without data or monitoring? Furthermore, I would point out that grizzlies

and hikers in Glacier do not always “get along fine,” or anywhere else for that matter. In the beginning of August 2019, two hikers in the Cabinet Mountains shot and killed an adult female who might have had cubs with her. Human-bear interactions generally result in far greater consequences to the bear than the humans. Human interaction is the bear’s number one cause of mortality.

13. There is no publicly available trail use data regarding the interaction of humans and grizzly populations for the PNT on the KNF, or any other trails. There are also implications on human safety that have not been evaluated. In the current Black Ram timber proposal, for which a Record of Decision has just been signed, there are plans to haul nearly 60MMBF out of the far backcountry in the Yaak. The plan envisions driving down the sections of road—some paved, others unpaved—that double as the PNT. This poses serious safety issues to thru-hikers that should have been analyzed through a Comprehensive Plan.

14. There is no Comprehensive Plan and yet the KNF agency personnel assert it will be all right to place numerous large (greater than the 40-acre maximum in the Forest Plan) clear cuts on top of the PNT. This is despite NSST direction that hikers should expect and experience a scenic quality and continuity to the entire 1200-mile length. The Black Ram project, which was just issued a Record of Decision, is moving forward even though the PNT does not have a Comprehensive Plan. I am concerned that major government actions are being approved without an analysis of the effects.

15. As a resident of the Yaak Valley and board member of YVFC, I do not support the existing route of the PNT where it is currently designated. Despite my opposition to the existing designation a thoughtful analysis of its current carrying capacity and management

objectives are still unavailable for us, as residents, recreationalists and naturalists, which we need to completely understand the impacts of the PNT.

16. Only approximately 25 grizzly bears remain in the valley. Such a low population coupled with the laissez faire attitude by the agency charged with recovery them and failing to do a comprehensive analysis of the PNT causes me great stress and concern about the viability of the population.

17. The Yaak's last 25 grizzlies have the potential to make us all more aware of the respect that is due other species in our ecosystem, particularly so vulnerable and sentient a species as a grizzly bear. I am dissuaded from frequenting the high alpine area for fear of contributing to what has been projected as a constant stream of unpermitted and essentially unmanaged and concentrated recreation. These bears enhance my life hugely and it's an honor to work for their protection, and to demand accountability from the agencies tasked with that responsibility.

18. I am not opposed to the fundamental utility of the PNT. I also have great respect for hikers, drawn to the beauty of the natural world that sustains so many of us, including myself—but a population of 25 grizzlies is just too small, and the species—the second-slowest reproducing land mammal in North America—too important to ignore the science and the need for a CP.

19. Interactions with the KNF supervisor and local USFS office have been tense and at times hostile. Residents of the Yaak and YVFC have specifically communicated the need for a CP to the agency. Despite our differences, the agency is obliged by Congress to conduct and provide for the public a comprehensive plan. One has not been provided.

20. The YVFC supports a re-route of the trail to a location identified by the 1980 feasibility study and we will continue promoting that to our delegation and the USFS. Studies and analysis by Dr. Lance Craighead and Wayne McCrory, as well as papers by Dr. David Mattson and literature searches by Dr. Barrie Gilbert, all find that a high-volume through-hiker trail that bisects the middle of over 26 miles of designated core habitat in the Yaak is a clear and present danger to the Yaak's last 25 grizzlies, as well as to the solace and pleasure of knowing the Yaak still has ecological integrity. That there is no CP, identified carrying capacity or sufficient monitoring is all the more upsetting.

21. In short, the failure to produce a Comprehensive Plan for the PNT is a disservice to the public and leaves open many questions regarding how many people may frequent the trail, specifically in core grizzly habitat, and what management objectives will be in force to protect a highly sensitive and threatened species, whose population very rarely interacts with humans. This failure irreparably harms my deep-rooted interests in grizzly bear conservation, the preservation of the Yaak's wilderness and the endorsement of responsible recreation.

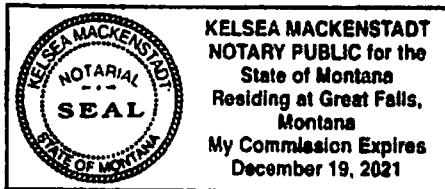
I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on August 22, 2017.

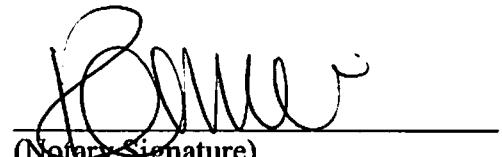


Rick Bass, COB of Yaak Valley Forest Council

State of Montana
County of Cascade

This instrument was signed or acknowledged before me on 8/22/19 by
Rick Bass
(Name of signer)




(Notary Signature)
[Affix seal/stamp to the left or below]